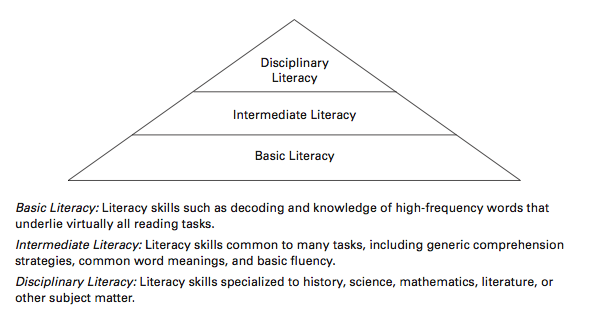
Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content- Area Literacy

TIMOTHY SHANAHAN CYNTHIA SHANAHAN University of Illinois at Chicago

Excerpts Reprinted from: *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 78 No. 1 Spring 2008 Copyright © by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

* Tradition–“…if we just provide adequate basic skills, from that point forward kids with adequate background knowledge will be able to read anything successfully.”
* New Challenges–“…The expansion of information-based technology, the internationalization of labor markets, and the changing of workplace demands have increased the importance of literacy as an ingredient of economic and social participation”
* Despite the growing need for literacy, especially higher-level literacy skills, assessment data suggest that adolescents today read no better, and perhaps marginally worse, than a generation ago.
* “… American 15-year-olds do not perform as well in reading as their age-matched peers in fourteen other countries…”
* “Apparently, strong early reading skills do not automatically develop into more complex skills…”
* “Given these gaps, there is a clear need to expand literacy instruction upward through the grades and to better support the reading of older students.”
* **“…there is a need to identify what a more advanced literacy curriculum might be and to determine how it could best be implemented.”**

How The Development of Literacy Progresses

* “The base of the pyramid represents the highly generalizable basic skills that are entailed in all or most reading tasks.”
* “As students go beyond these basic aspects of literacy, usually by the upper elementary grades, they begin to add more sophisticated routines and responses to their reading repertoires. Students develop the skills that allow them to decode multisyllabic words quickly and easily, and they learn to respond with automaticity to words that do not appear with high frequency in text.”
* “Finally, during middle school and high school, many students begin to master even more specialized reading routines and language uses, and these particular outcomes, although powerful and valuable, are also more constrained in their applicability to most reading tasks.”
* “A high school student who can do a reasonably good job of reading a story in an English class might not be able to make much sense of biology or algebra books, and vice versa.”
* Basic Problem: “The pyramid illustrates the increasing specialization of reading skills, but a similar structure could be used to accurately illustrate the declining amount of instructional support and assistance that is usually provided to students as they progress through the grades.”